

WHAT MOTIVATES SENIOR MANAGERS THE CASE OF ROMANIA

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Abstract

While a great deal of understanding has been gained about senior managers' motivation in the West, very little has been done in the Eastern European countries to understand what motivates senior managers. This article is based on the results of a first time study that was carried out in 23 Romanian organizations. It aims at gaining a better understanding of senior managers' motivation for improved performance and effectiveness at work. The methodology employed, consisting of survey questionnaire and samples interviews, led to the emergence of a group of factors including "recognition and appreciation", "salary and remuneration", "promotional status", and "job satisfaction". Moreover, although there are similarities between what motivates senior managers in both Western and Eastern European countries, the differences point to the need for better understanding of senior managers, their perception and their views as well as organizational and the wider contexts in which they work.

Key words: Motivation, Executives, Romania, Salaries, Recognition

INTRODUCTION

Motivation originates from the word "move" and therefore can be seen as an internal drive necessary to guide people's actions and behaviors towards achievement of some goals. Motivation is often orientated towards the satisfaction of certain needs and expectations (Luthans, 1969; Mullins, 1993). Of course, the strength and intensity of the drive determine the amount of effort, time and talent people invest in their work.

However, while a great deal of understanding has been gained about senior managers' motivation in the West, very little has been done in Eastern Europe to understand what motivates managers in countries such as Romania.

This paper is based on the results of a first time study that was recently carried out in 23 Romanian organizations. It was aimed at gaining a better understanding of the senior managers' motivation for improved performance and their effectiveness at work. The attention will be paid to the results of a study, specifically those that deal with the motivating factors responsible for the increased effectiveness of senior managers at work. Finally, relevant conclusions will be reached.

A study in Romania

In 1995-97 a study was carried out in Romania which was concerned with senior managers/officials who work for private and public organizations. The study targeted more than 70 senior managers, in a total of 23 organizations. These organizations ranged from Telecommunication, Ministry of Agriculture, the Restructuring Agency , to International Foundation for management, Railways and the Ministry of Education and Finance.

Access to such a wide range of organizations ensured against contamination of data primarily caused by the strong influence of “organizational culture” in one or two sites. In this way, an overview of the perception of the senior managers , their needs and their effectiveness was achieved together with the advantage of having a fairly varied and maybe comprehensive selection of constraints , demands and difficulties which senior managers thought were impeding their progress and effectiveness at work.

The study involved a survey consisting of questionnaire and subsequently the use of semi-structured interviews. It included several visits to various organizations and a number of hours of collecting relevant data. After completion of the fieldwork and analysis respondents were informed of the results.

The methodology employed in Romania for exploring the motivating factors, amongst others , behind increased effectiveness of senior managers consisted of survey questionnaire and the use of sample interviews.

The senior managers respondents were first provided with a series of open and less structured statements. For example , they were asked :in your opinion who is an effective manager at work? How do you describe an effective manager? What is your motivation for increased effectiveness at work? Then they were asked to prioritise their responses by placing a value , for example first, second, or third, to their responses and make comments on them. In other words , they were asked what, in their opinion, and in order of priority to them, were factors which acted as motivators for their increased effectiveness at work.

On the whole , 35 categories of responses were identified. Then, the cumulative values allocated to each item indicated that the responses provided two groups of motivators . The nine items(1:recognition and appreciation from superior;2:money and salary’3:improving task performance;4:increased knowledge managerial styles;5:promotional status;6:team work;7:job satisfaction;8:self-development and

discipline;9:ability and confidence.) provided to be indicators and motives groups which were viewed as most important in terms of motivating senior managers towards increased effectiveness.

On the other hand, having analyzed the quantifiable data ,sample interviews were then carried out and senior managers were specifically asked to make comments on the factors which constitute the main motivation of others-colleagues, peers or even their superiors.

The age of the respondents varied with the youngest at 27 and the oldest at 60 years old. Most respondents were in their 30s(25 per cent). A large proportion were in their 40s(13 per cent) and a few were below 30 and above 50. All senior managers are educated with at least a first degree and a few with Master's and higher degrees such as PhD. On the whole, the majority seemed to believe that earning a first degree from university provided the foundation for operating as a senior manager and clearly had an effect on the effectiveness of the managers involved. Most senior managers reported: "we took our first degree and we carried on because we had limited choice. It was good to have it and we went for it." To those who were not familiar with Eastern European countries and the centralized economic background , it may come as a surprise to see so many managers with an engineering background. Indeed, 53 per cent of the senior participants in the study had graduated degrees in engineering with emphasis on mechanical engineering. A few possessed a first degree in electronics, or systems and computing. Of the senior managers, 31 per cent reported that they were economists and had a different perception of themselves and their likelihood of increased effectiveness.

Other senior managers explained that choice was not available and most people were encouraged to learn hands-on skills: intriguingly, however, it was observed that , unlike Western countries were a high proportion of graduates in engineering are male, a large proportion of Romanian engineering graduates are female and did not see this as a disadvantage to their career development. What , however, did seem to preoccupy the graduates was that they were aware that , in order to achieve a high level of performance at work, they were deemed to require advance training in management or that they ought to possess academic and professional qualifications in social sciences.

The economists, it seemed, were clearly in an advantageous position. The process of transition made sense to them , but most felt that they should not leave the certainty of central planning and control altogether ."Most people do not understand. It gets worse before it gets better...but the public are not patient and want immediate change". None of the senior participants

were graduates in administration or business studies, though they occupied high positions in their organization.

Senior managers were aware of the inadequacy of their educational background and that they had the need for more experience, preferably through management training, for their increased effectiveness. This again supported the thesis that senior managers indeed are aware of factors that can contribute to their improved performance.

Senior managers' work experience of course, varied from less than five years to 20 years and over. This was due to the differences in age rather than any other organizational factors. As a rule, graduates in Romania begin their career almost immediately after the completion of their university study. This suggests that almost all the senior managers involved in the survey secured employment immediately after completion of their graduate education. They changed employment thereafter every few years.

There appears to be a relationship between the participants' age and years of accumulated work experience. On the whole, 25 per cent of the senior managers had between one and ten years of work experience. The managers and officials in this category showed the most enthusiasm for change in career and willingness to meet the challenges of the new changing environment.

The most intriguing issue raised was that of the senior managers' awareness of their own effectiveness at work and that they felt the degree of effectiveness in their work was partly determined by motivation to work and partly their competence and knowledge and skills. Often, it was reported that hygiene factors such as salary, supervision and working conditions were not perceived as the sole contributing factors for a decision to change job but the need to be effective and to do the right thing became increasingly important to them.

Motivating factors

As shown two items, namely: recognition and appreciation (psychological factors) and money and salary (financial incentives), seem to take the first place in order of priority. The discussion in the interviews with senior managers, by and large, evolved around the subject of remuneration and receiving feedback from their superiors. The senior participants believed that such feedback provides the basis for recognition of work done well by the individual manager involved.

Significantly, other factors such as increased knowledge and skills, involvement in teamwork, job satisfaction, self-development and improved competence, all pointed to the presence of three major underlying factors, namely: the managers themselves, the nature of the job, and the contextual nature of the work related issues concerned.

Some senior managers felt alienated and saw no rapid solution to the problem of motivation in the public sector. Others maintained that, while they did not wish to return to the situation as it was prior to 1989, they were still unhappy with the present situation.

All managers showed their discontent with the managerial style and traditional attitudes of their top management who took things for granted. Good work and high quality performance are not often recognized. The old style and culture of passive interaction still persist especially in ministries and other government organizations. Some top management was referred to as “old guards” who have not really changed: They have to show that they are for transition but in reality they found it difficult to change. Change of attitudes is not as easy as a change of words. They are the ones who need training, and a lot of it.

Lack of recognition is not always a direct consequence of old values and traditional managerial styles. Often, the organizational set-up in its bureaucratic form prohibits the presence of and promotion of different cultural values. Thus, effective communication is often frustrated as a result. Insufficient interpersonal skills on the part of top team management leave senior managers feeling left out in the cold. Observation showed that the need for recognition of good work and appreciation of “hard work” seems to become exaggerated because it acts as a substitute and replacement for a lack of purchasing power.

CONCLUSION

Motivation can be regarded as the necessary drive towards achievement of some goals. The desire to satisfy needs and the intensity of the drive to achieve a given, perceived or assumed goal determines the total effort invested in work.

Both approaches to motivation-content and process theories-partially explain the behavior of the senior managers at work. The lack of access to organizations within developing economies such as Romania has often led to the assumption that the findings of the empirical research within Western countries unquestionably applies to those of managers elsewhere.

The methodology employed in this first time study attempted to avoid any preconceived notions of what motivates managers in Romania. Thus, the quality of the data collected became of the paramount importance. Moreover, the perception of managers and the reason for viewing the world of work as they did led to the emergence of constructs and consequently an informed understanding of their needs, drives and struggle to succeed.

The senior managers in the public sector all reported facing difficulties such as low pay, inferior working conditions, long hours, too much

responsibility without power or authority and an awareness of their worth (hygiene factors). Motivators such as responsibility, nature of the job, appreciation, recognition and the need for achievement (psychological) seemed to be the main driving forces behind senior managers' attitudes towards increased effectiveness.

There are lessons to be learned from this study for both academics and scholars, on the one hand, and the practitioners who work with organizations in Eastern Europe, on the other hand. Maybe the more striking conclusion to be reached is that, although there are similarities between Western managers and their counterparts in Eastern European countries, the differences provide the basis for a better understanding of the managerial work and managers' motivations at work.

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